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C. Daniel Mote Jr. marks his fifth anniversary as president of the University of Maryland this year. As the region's largest university began its fall semester last week, campus officials were glowing over the school's high placement in the annual ranking of colleges by U.S. News & World Report -- but struggling to absorb another round of state budget cuts. Mote spoke with staff writer Amy Argetsinger.

QWhat has been the impact of the state funding cuts?

AOur budget reduction over one year from state cuts and mandatory increases is \$ 81 million on this campus. The most tangible impact for students has been tuition increases -- it's about an additional \$ 1,000 for Maryland residents and about \$ 2,300 for nonresident students. We're also having reductions in staffing [about 200 positions eliminated, including 82 layoffs], and we're looking hard at ways we can do more with less money. We haven't strayed at all, though, from our commitment to build a great university and have excellent programs.

Will students notice the impact?

They will notice some things, but I don't think they will feel they have lost a lot. The number of dining halls will be fewer; we're not going to serve food at the Rossborough Inn. But I think our commitment to the excellence of the place will not be changed.

Despite the budget woes, Maryland is inching up in the rankings, now hovering just below U.S. News & World Report's influential top 50 universities, and at 17th on the list of public institutions. What does this signify, and can the university's gains be sustained amid the budget cuts?

When I arrived five years ago, we were somewhere in the thirties among public universities . . . It's a continuing recognition of the quality of the programs here; this latest ranking also shows that we have 50 programs in the top 15 . . . We need to really think deeply about how to continue to move the university forward -- we don't see the current situation as a short-term aberration. The states have been steadily backing away from backing higher education, and the state of Maryland has never been a strong supporter -- they've just set the goal for us and told us we need to make it happen. It's going to require some deep conversations among faculty and the Board of Regents and alumni in terms of the kind of model we're going to adopt to let us move forward. Tuition is part of it; private support is part of it. Our enormous advantages of location in Washington and Baltimore and how we can utilize our relationships with the federal laboratories and local businesses -- all of that has to be part of the discussion.

The NCAA recently placed Maryland's athletic program on a one-year probation because of football recruiting violations. Is this a warning sign that Maryland's sports culture has grown overzealous?

It's certainly a warning and one you don't like to take. But I don't think it's a sign of an overzealous sports culture. It was a single assistant coach who was way off base and out of control, and there's no question he did things that were wrong. We needed to be given a penalty, but I'm glad they gave us the minimal one because they recognized we're trying our best to do the right things and act quickly.

The past two years have seen a startling number of tragedies around campus, including a suicide and attempted murder, two tornado deaths, a stabbing fatality and two drug or alcohol overdoses. The student newspaper last year criticized you for being "out of touch" and not always serving as the out-front spokesman in these cases. What is your response?

No one is outside of criticism, but I don't know why they did that because [last year's editors] never came to meet with me . . . I think I'm very visible on campus. I find it quite gratifying that people are quite supportive of my leadership here . . . The leadership question is a key one, obviously -- we've had a lot of incidents that have befallen us, and I try to be out there and out front on all of them and provide the guidance the campus needs. I'm happy and pleased with the actions we've taken.

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